



# STATE OF CONNECTICUT

## ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN AFFAIRS COMMISSION

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**Legislative Analyst**

Alok Bhatt

Thursday, March 5, 2015

Dear Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Alok Bhatt. I serve as Legislative Analyst of the Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission (APAAC/the Commission). The Connecticut General Assembly (CGA) established APAAC in 2008 as a nonpartisan entity to engage the legislature and advocate on behalf of the state's Asian Pacific American (APA) population. APAAC monitors and promotes the civil rights, education, health, economic development, and overall security of a high-diversity, low-density, and geographically dispersed population.

While myriad community organizations and a handful of service providers effectively accommodate the needs of APA communities, Connecticut lacks a unified voice to represent its challenges and contributions. As a liaison between the people and the State, APAAC signifies such a voice.

Even with minimal funding, APAAC has been able to provide crucial programs and services for the APA community. Through our Legal Education Workshops, we have been able to engage and educate APA communities around the state regarding significant topics such as housing, police interactions, civil rights immigration, and preliminary business logistics. Similarly, our Medical Education Workshops deliver important information on health issues widely impacting APAs in Connecticut and across the country, including diabetes, asthma, and smoking cessation.

Our I-SPEAK card campaign, which notifies both community members and providers who receive federal funds of the need to provide qualified language interpretation, has been well-received on the ground and by various agencies.

APAAC is currently planning additional initiatives to promote a greater quality of life for Connecticut APAs, and increase our state's total equity in well-being.

In following up our first Needs Assessment survey, which provided an extensive snowball sample dataset on challenges facing Cambodian, Laotian, and Vietnamese groups, we hope to conduct a similar survey on

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Indian and Chinese communities. Although Census data reflects high educational attainment, income, and housing security among these groups, they too face many complex challenges. No ethnic population should be pigeonholed as homogenous groups without any social or economic issues. The Commission aims to analyze and address these specific challenges through collaboration with community-based and other organizations, and policy advocacy when appropriate.

With a recent roster of two staff and a fluctuating count of Commissioners, APAAC has significantly increased its community engagement, increasing our visibility and cultivating trust in the Commission as an effective advocate for the diverse APA population. Decreasing funding for a Commission that has justified its existence will remove a critical resource from an already marginalized population.

Ultimately, reducing APAAC funding reduces the State of Connecticut's capacity to address severe disparities in well-being. We cannot allow the APA minority to remain silent; our communities deserve an effective voice in the legislature. Fulfilling this role requires the resources to engage the community and craft programs, services, and other initiatives for their benefit. We do not exclude any peoples from our goals. APAAC stands in solidarity with all groups, minority and otherwise, to include APAs in the State's collective pursuit of social and economic progress.

APAAC appreciates your time and consideration of this highly important matter.

Sincerely,

Alok Bhatt  
*Legislative Analyst, Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission*

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